

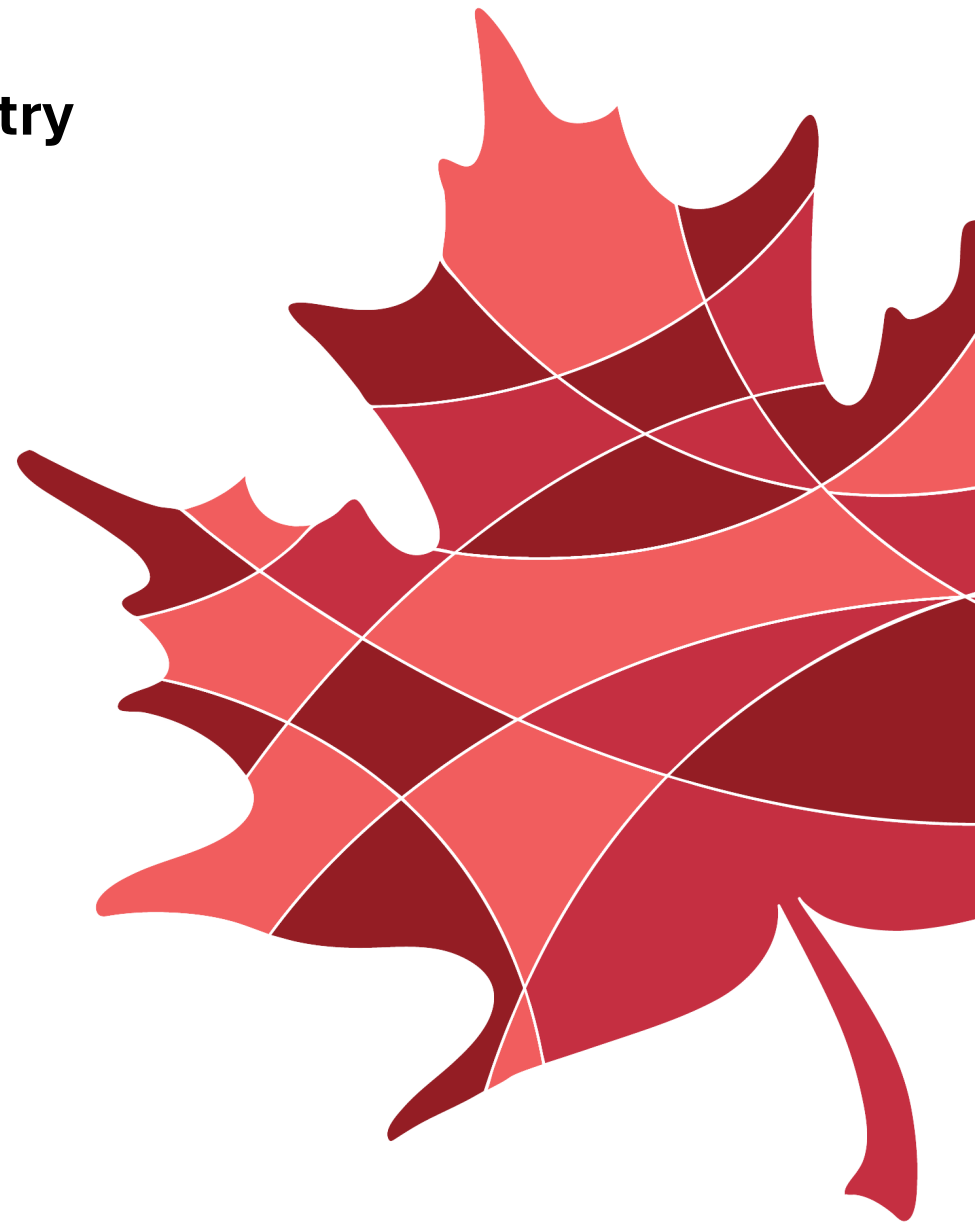
Occupational Mobility and Wage Consequences of Express Entry and Non-Express Entry Immigrants

IRCC-StatCan Joint Study

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Introduction

Research Questions

1. How do Express Entry immigrants compare to non-Express Entry immigrants in occupational mobility, specifically by:

- All occupations and selected occupations in health care, STEM, and trades
- Employment income earned as a temporary resident prior to admission
- Immigration program
- Human capital factors such as official language knowledge and education attainment

2. What are the wage outcomes of occupational mobility for stayers and movers?

Why does this matter?

- **Inform selection policy and program design:** Evidence helps shape immigration programs that admit candidates likely to remain in, or move into, occupations where labour demand is high.
- **Support economic contribution and integration:** Understanding the reasons for occupational mobility can inform strategies to improve occupational retention, enhance skill utilization, and strengthen immigrants' economic outcomes.

Data and Methodology

Data source: Linked data from the 2021 Census and the IMDB (Longitudinal Immigration Database).

Target population

- Recent economic principal applicants admitted between 2015 and 2020
- Immigration to Quebec is administered through the Government of Quebec, as per the Canada-Quebec Accord and was not included in the scope of this study
- Had an intended (original) occupation at admission, as recorded in their immigration application
- Were aged 18 to 54 at admission, focusing on the prime working-age population

Definition of occupational mobility (retention) using NOC 2016

- **Occupational retention:** If the 3-digit NOC code of the intended/original occupation at admission matches the code of the actual occupation reported in the 2021 Census, the immigrant is considered retained in their intended/original occupation and is a stayer.
- **Occupational mobility:** If the 3-digit NOC codes differ, the immigrant is considered mobile and is a mover—meaning they transitioned to a different occupation than originally intended.

Why the 3-digit NOC measure?

Occupational mobility can be measured at different levels of detail:

- **2-digit (broad category):** too general; risks masking important differences across occupations.
- **3-digit (sub-group):** offers a balanced level of detail, capturing meaningful occupational shifts while avoiding excessive fragmentation.
- **4-digit (specific occupation):** very detailed; risks overstating mobility by treating moves between similar occupations as occupational shifts.

The 3-digit NOC level is selected as the main measure because it balances breadth and specificity, ensuring a reliable and policy-relevant picture of occupational mobility.

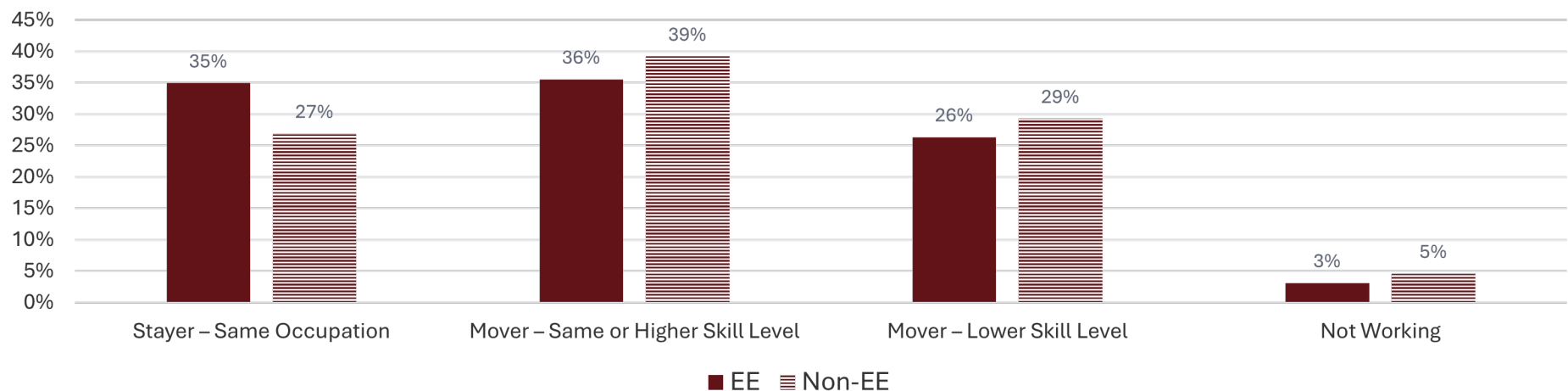
1. How do Express Entry immigrants compare to non-Express Entry immigrants in occupational mobility?

Express Entry immigrants are more likely to remain in their original occupations and less likely to move to lower-skilled jobs or be out of work compared to non-Express Entry immigrants.

Express Entry immigrants show stronger occupational retention, with more staying in their original jobs (35% vs. 27%) and fewer moving to lower-skilled roles (26% vs. 29%) or being out of work (3% vs. 5%).

Non-Express Entry immigrants demonstrate marginally higher mobility into jobs at the same or higher skill level (39% vs. 36%).

Figure 1: Occupational mobility among EE and non-EE economic immigrants, 2021

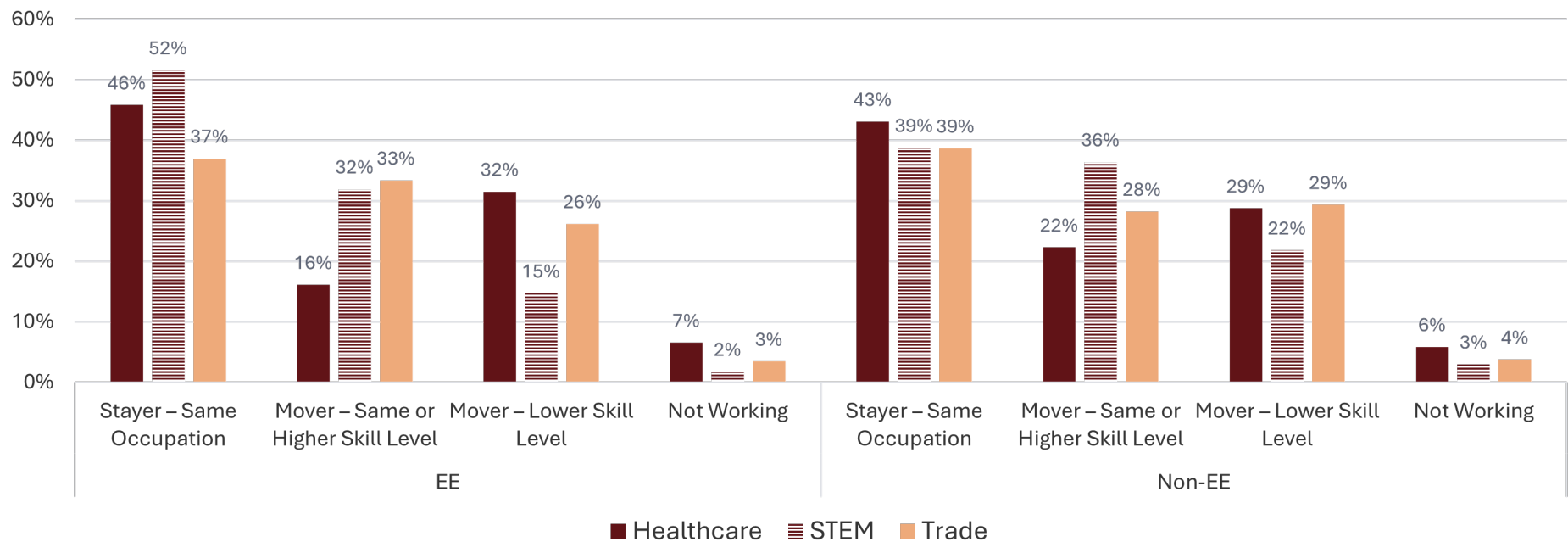


Source: Census 2021 linked to the Longitudinal Immigration Database

Express Entry immigrants stand out for strong occupational stability in STEM fields, with over half remaining in their original occupations and only small shares moving downward or out of work.

- STEM occupations: EE immigrants retained their original jobs at much higher rates than non-EE (52% vs. 39%) and were less likely to move downward (15% vs. 22%) or be out of work (2% vs. 4%).
- Health and trades: Compared to STEM, retention rates were lower—46% in health and 37% in trades for EE immigrants—with both EE and non-EE groups more often shifting into lower-skilled jobs or out of work, underscoring sector-specific challenges after admission.

Figure 2: Occupational mobility among EE and non-EE economic immigrants of selected occupations, 2021

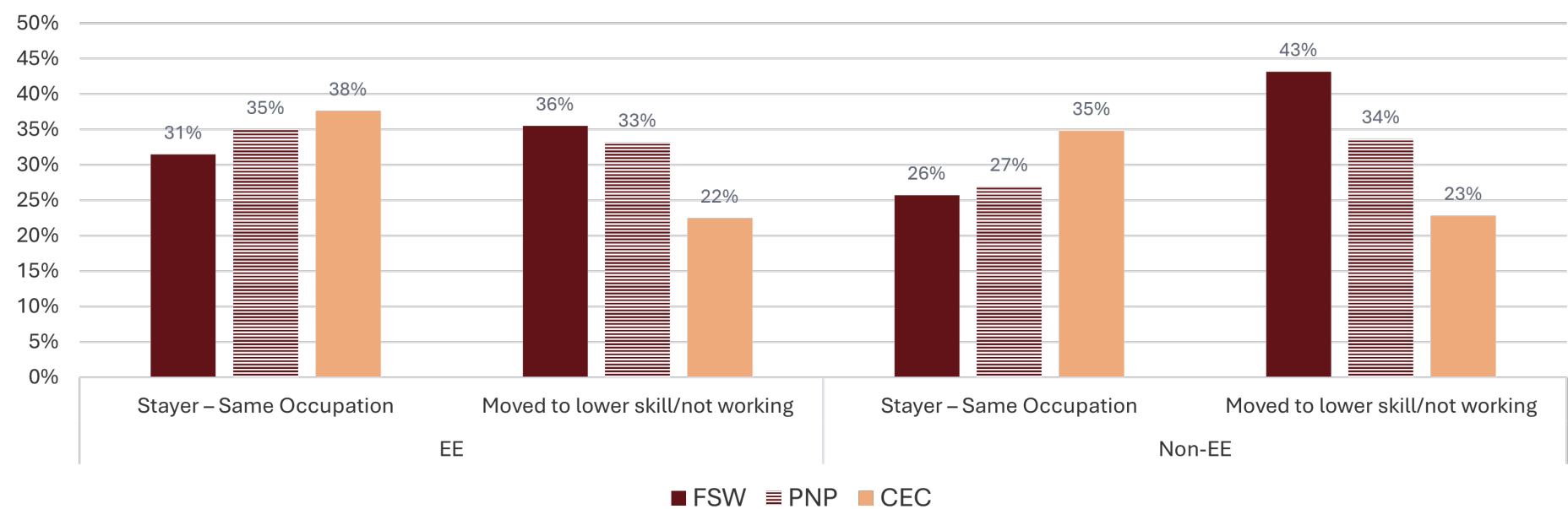


Source: Census 2021 linked to the Longitudinal Immigration Database

Across both EE and non-EE immigrants, those from the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) show the strongest occupational stability, while Federal Skilled Workers (FSWs) face the greatest risk of moving to lower-skilled jobs or being out of work.

- Among EE immigrants, CECs again stood out with the strongest retention (38%) and the lowest downward mobility (22%), while FSWs (36%) and PNPs (33%) were more likely to move into lower-skilled jobs or out of work.
- Among non-EE immigrants, FSWs had the weakest retention (26%) and the highest downward mobility (43%), while CECs were more stable with higher retention (35%) and lower risk of moving to lower-skilled jobs or being out of work (23%).

Figure 3: Occupational mobility among EE and non-EE economic immigrants by admission program, 2021

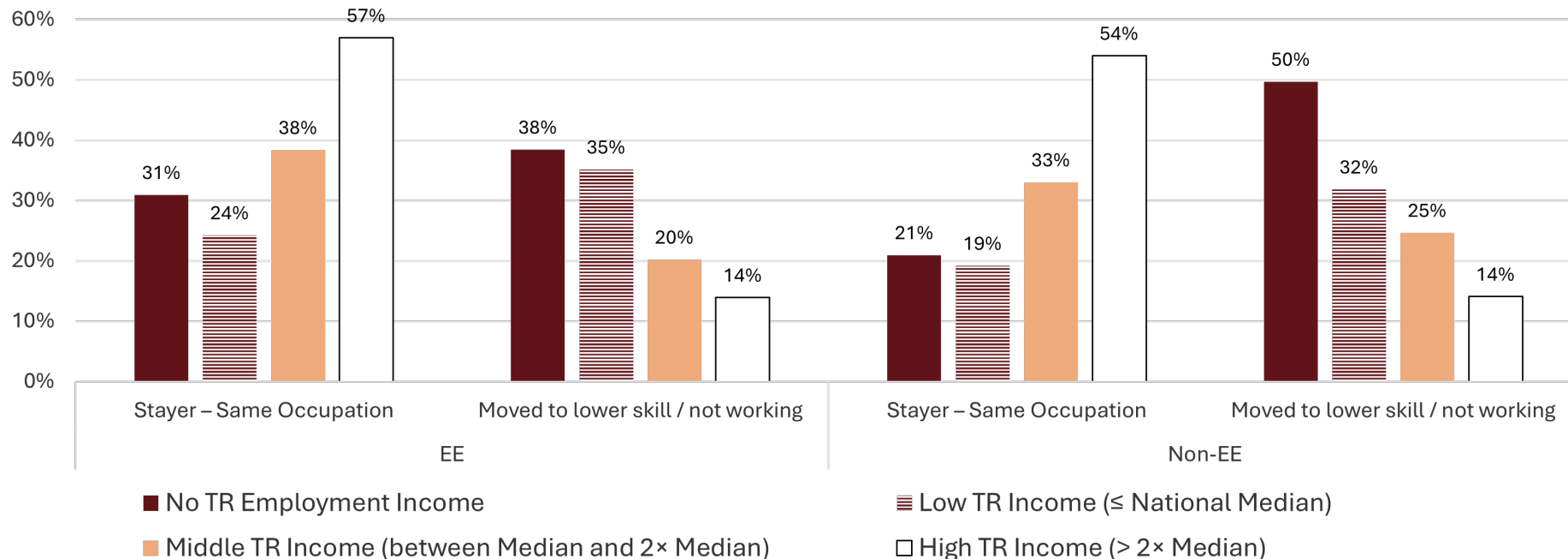


Source: Census 2021 linked to the Longitudinal Immigration Database

Pre-admission TR income strongly shapes occupational mobility: higher earners are more likely to stay in the same occupation and less likely to move downward or be out of work, while low earners show even lower retention than those with no pre-admission income.

- Higher TR income is linked to the strongest occupational retention: Among high TR income earners, EE immigrants had a retention rate of 57% compared to 54% for non-EE immigrants.
- Low TR income is associated with the weakest occupational stability: Retention was lowest for low-income immigrants (24% EE; 19% non-EE), even below those with no TR income (31% EE; 21% non-EE).

Figure 4: Occupational mobility among EE and non-EE economic immigrants by pre-admission TR employment income, 2021



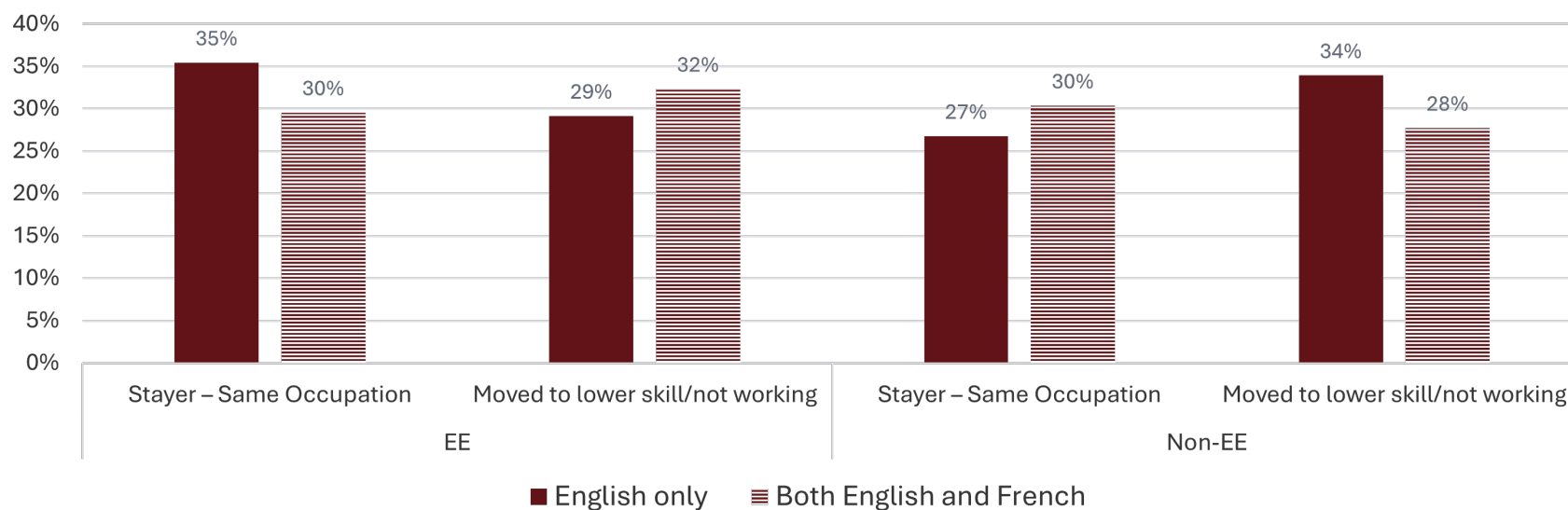
Note: Pre-admission TR employment income used in the study is the highest employment income in the 10 years prior to admission.

Source: Census 2021 linked to the Longitudinal Immigration Database

English-only speakers show slightly stronger occupational stability among EE immigrants, while bilinguals (English and French) have a modest advantage among non-EE immigrants.

- Among EE immigrants, English-only speakers showed stronger outcomes with higher stability (35%) and lower downward mobility (29%) compared to bilinguals (30% stability; 32% downward mobility).
- Among non-EE immigrants, bilinguals had stronger outcomes with higher stability (30%) and lower downward mobility (28%) compared to English-only immigrants (27% stability; 34% downward mobility).

Figure 5: Occupational mobility among EE and non-EE economic immigrants by knowledge of official languages in 2021 census



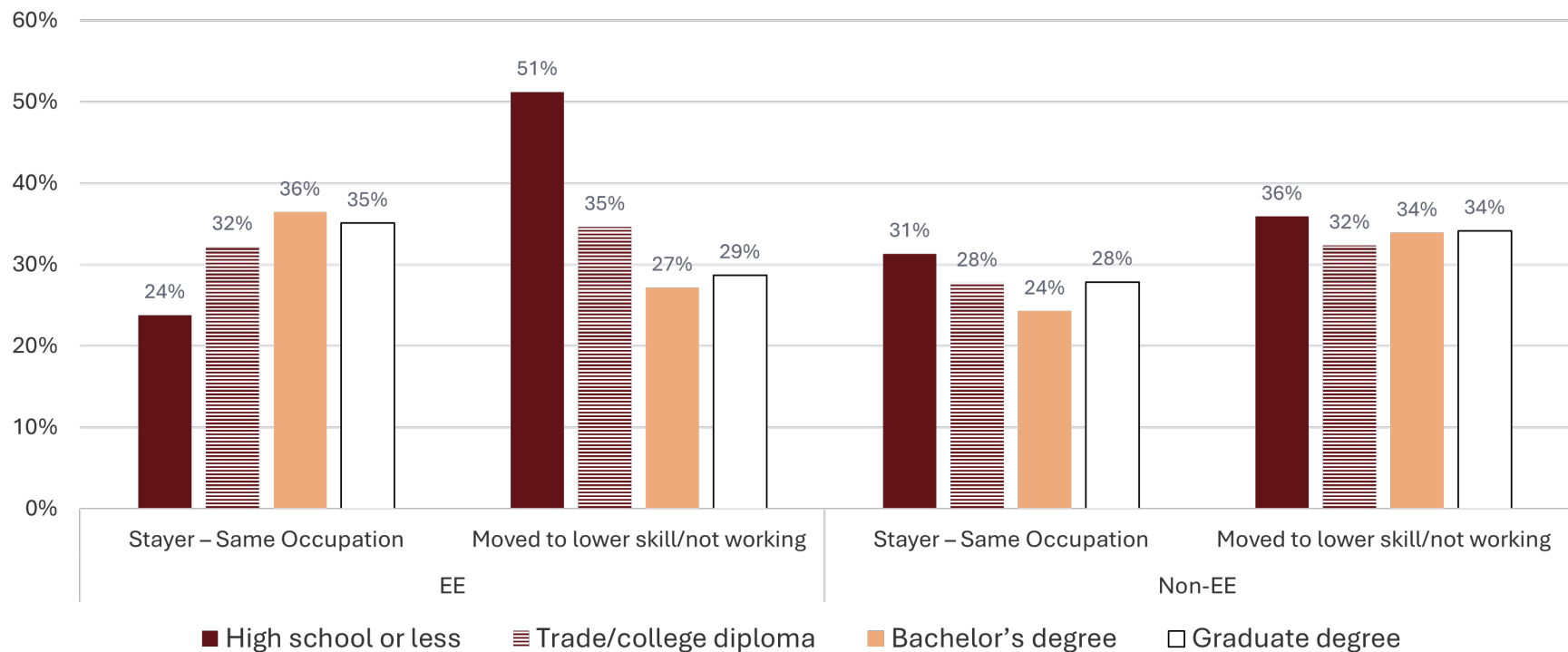
Note: Estimates are not reported for immigrants with French only or neither official language ability due to very small sample size.

Source: Census 2021 linked to the Longitudinal Immigration Database

EE immigrants with graduate or bachelor's degrees show stronger occupational stability, while those with only high school or less face the greatest risk of moving into lower-skilled jobs or being out of work.

- Compared to their non-EE counterparts, EE immigrants with graduate or bachelor's degrees are more occupationally stable.
- EE immigrant with only high school or less show much weaker retention (24%), with over half (51%) moving into lower-skilled jobs or out of work.
- Among non-EE immigrants, retention is somewhat higher for those with only high school or less (31%) than for other non-EE groups, but they also face a greater risk of moving downward or being out of work.

Figure 6: Occupational mobility among EE and non-EE Economic immigrants by education attainment in 2021 census



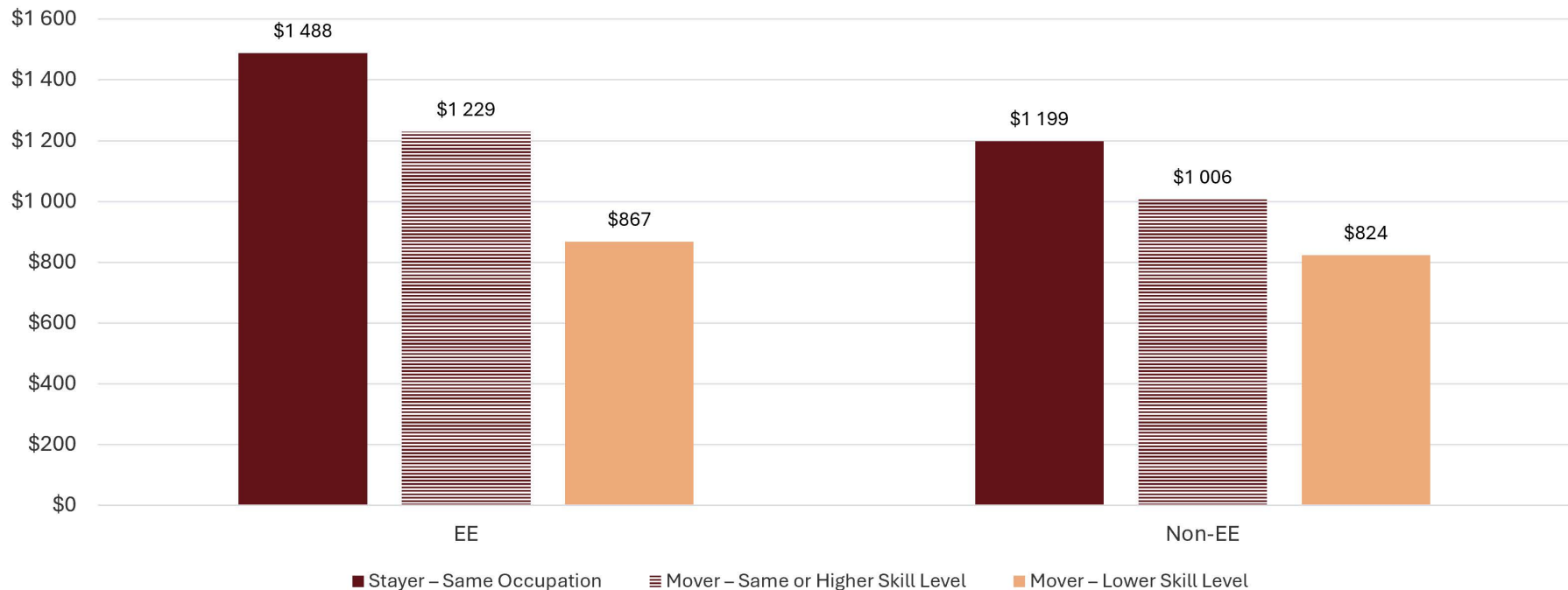
Source: Census 2021 linked to the Longitudinal Immigration Database

2. Wage Outcomes of Occupational Stayers and Movers

Immigrants who remain in their original occupation earn the highest median wages, even higher than those who move to same- or higher-skill jobs.

- Among EE immigrants, occupational stayers have a median weekly wage of \$1,488, much higher than movers to same- or higher-skill jobs, and especially higher than movers to lower-skill jobs (\$867).
- EE immigrants consistently earn higher median wages than non-EE immigrants across all occupational mobility categories.

Figure 7: Median weekly wage by occupational mobility of EE and non-EE immigrants, 2021

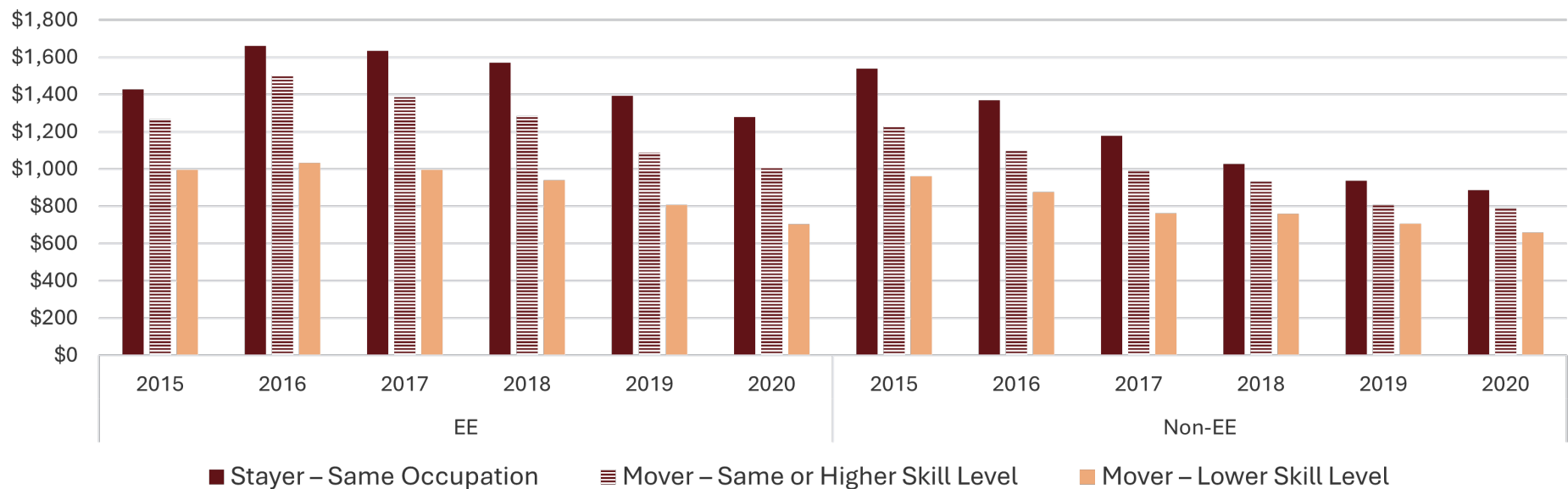


Source: Census 2021 linked to the Longitudinal Immigration Database

For each EE and non-EE admission cohort from 2015 to 2020, occupational movers earn less than stayers, even when they transition to occupations at the same or higher skill level.

- Earlier admission cohorts generally display higher wage levels, except for the 2015 EE cohort, which shows relatively lower wages compared to subsequent 2016-2018 cohorts.
- EE immigrants generally have higher median weekly wages than their non-EE counterparts across each landing cohort and occupational mobility category, except for the 2015 EE cohort.

Figure 8: Median weekly wages in 2021 by occupational mobility and admission cohort

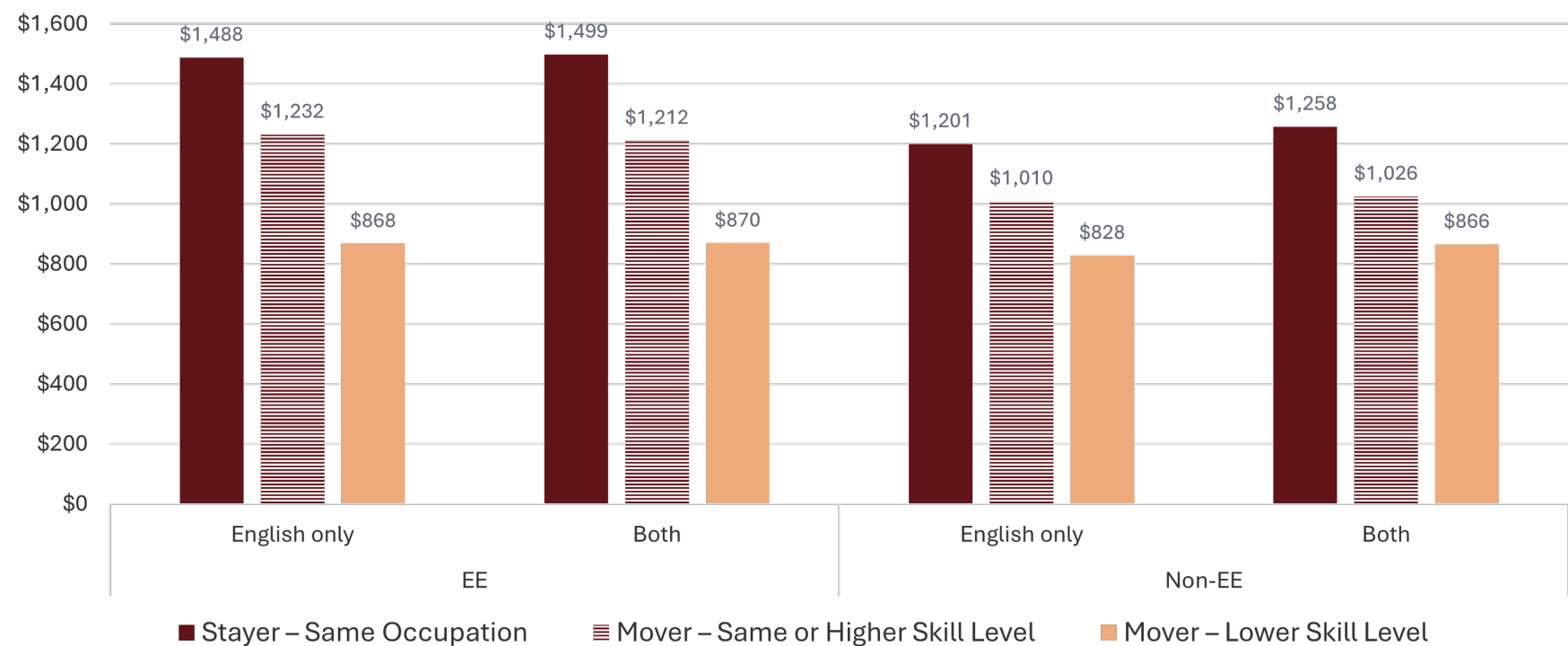


Source: Census 2021 linked to the Longitudinal Immigration Database

The wage gap between occupational stayer and movers is consistent across language groups: job changes—whether to lower-, same-, or higher-skilled jobs—are mostly associated with lower rather than higher pay.

For each occupational category (stayers, upward movers, and downward movers), EE immigrants earn higher median weekly wages than their non-EE counterparts, whether English-only or bilingual.

Figure 9: Median weekly wages by occupational mobility and knowledge of official language in 2021 census

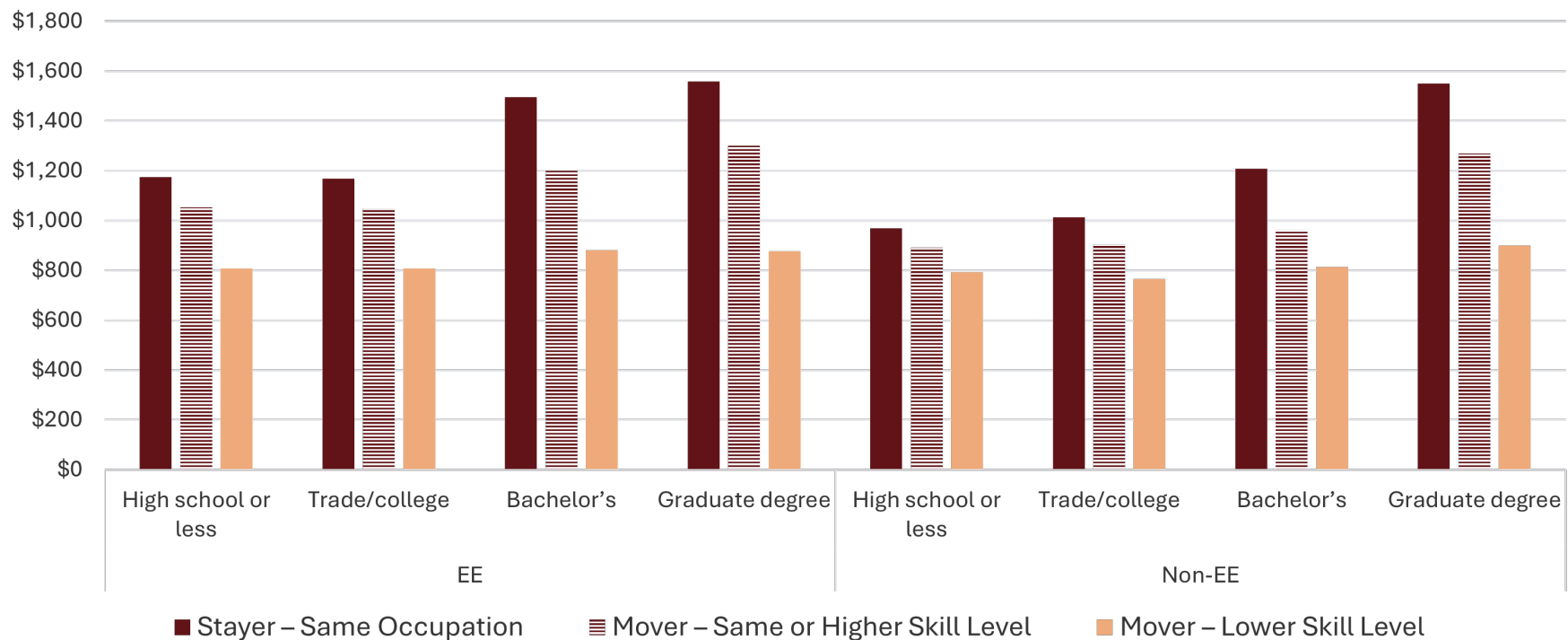


Note: Estimates are not reported immigrants with French only or with neither official language ability due to very small sample size.
Source: Census 2021 linked to the Longitudinal Immigration Database

The same pattern holds within each education level: movers—whether to higher-, same-, or lower-skilled jobs—earn less than stayers, for both EE and non-EE immigrants.

- For both EE and non-EE immigrants, those with higher education levels earn higher wages than their less-educated counterparts within each occupational mobility category.
- The wage gap between stayers and movers is especially pronounced among the highly educated, with bachelor's and graduate degree holders seeing the largest differences in weekly wages.

Figure 10: Median weekly wages by occupational mobility and education level in 2021 census



Source: Census 2021 linked to the Longitudinal Immigration Database

Conclusion and Discussion

Occupational Mobility

Summary of findings

- EE immigrants show stronger occupational stability than non-EE immigrants, with higher retention in original occupations and lower risks of downward mobility or being out of work.
- STEM occupations stand out: Over half of EE STEM immigrants remain in their original occupations. In contrast, other occupations such as Healthcare and Trades, show much lower retention and greater downward movement.
- CECs consistently display the strongest stability, while FSWs—especially non-EE—face the greatest risk of moving downwards.
- Pre-admission TR income is a strong predictor of stability: High earners are more likely to stay, while low earners show the weakest retention—even below those with no TR income.
- English-only speakers show stronger occupational stability among EE immigrants, while bilinguals show stronger outcomes among non-EE immigrants.
- Education matters: EE immigrants with graduate or bachelor's degrees show stronger stability, while those with only high school or less face the highest risk of downward mobility or being out of work.

Discussion

- The Express Entry system is effective in selecting candidates who are more likely to remain in high-demand occupations, particularly in STEM, thereby supporting Canada's labour market needs. However, lower retention in healthcare and trades points to possible sector-specific barriers, such as licensing, credential recognition, apprenticeship requirements, or differences in occupational pathways after admission.
- Pre-admission high TR income should become a key selection factor, but TR income below the national median should not be considered an advantage for candidates.
- Human capital factors such as education and language ability remain strong predictors of occupational stability and should continue to be emphasized in both selection and integration policies.

Wage Consequences of Mobility

Summary of findings

- Across both EE and non-EE immigrants, occupational stayers consistently earn the highest wages — even higher than movers to same- or higher-skill occupations. This pattern is robust across admission cohorts, education levels, and language groups.
- EE immigrants maintain a wage advantage over non-EE immigrants in most cohorts, occupational mobility categories, education levels, and language groups.
- Education amplifies the wage gap between stayers and movers, with the largest differences observed among those holding bachelor's or graduate degrees.

Discussion

- Occupational retention matters: Stayers consistently earn higher median wages, making retention a useful indicator of both economic integration and the effectiveness of immigrant selection mechanisms.
- Strengthening supports that help immigrants remain in their intended or original occupations — such as credential recognition and bridging programs — can potentially boost both individual outcomes and broader economic contributions.